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- The use of these materials challenged historic architects to reach higher and higher into the heavens.
- The sheer beauty of experiencing nature creates mysticism.



Constantine George Pappas, FAIA, is a practicing architect located in Royal Oak, Michigan, specializing in the design of Religious Architecture. His firm has won numerous Design Awards and has been featured in local and national periodicals.

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The Mysticism of Religious Architecture

Constantine George Pappas, FAIA;

What Is Religious Architecture?

Religious Architecture can be best described as the creation of a space that allows a person to have a spiritual interaction with a higher being. History has brought us many examples of this building type. In fact, just about every culture has made its trademark in representing itself through its architecture. Starting from the Egyptian Pyramids, Temples of Greece, the Cathedrals of Europe, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic Temples throughout the world, religious architecture has touched the senses like no other building type. The creation of this religious space allows the environment to be dedicated to the glory of God and depicts a mysticism that cannot be found in a sports facility, office building, or industrial facility.

Looking back in history, religious architecture has also contributed to the use and ideas of today's materials. The use of these materials challenged historic architects to reach higher and higher into the heavens. The by-product of new building techniques has allowed more light to fill the vast space by introducing glass between the building's structure.

In Europe, or just about any other location, it is evident where the religious building is located. Normally, it is the highest topographical location. It's the most decorated of all the town's buildings. It is positioned to be in the central area of a city. Most likely, the Church is located adjacent to a plaza where people can interact with the religious building or interact with one another. With all these examples of history all over the globe, has mankind learned anything about religious architecture?

What Creates the Mysticism?

While everyone can define in their minds what creates the mysticism in these buildings, the commonalities include the sculpture of space, dynamic or simple structural system, and the method of light infiltration. It is how the light filters through the space that creates mysticism.

It can be as simple as one opening in a building, but, a completely transparent building may have the same mystical effect. All religious space transforms our thinking process in a spiritual way. In its most simple form, these three elements combine to transform a space into a spiritual experience. Religious architecture compresses the senses in a very special way that most buildings do not. The experience makes you think, ponder, dream, and, most importantly, pray.



After visiting a religious space, one has experienced a transformation that no other building type can initiate. The changing rhythm of light through the space allows for transcendence to a different spiritual level.

The most interesting aspect of this mysticism is that a space does not have to have grandness or volume. Today's modern religious spaces create the connection to the surrounding environment. Some spaces focus on religious imagery. Combine a natural environment and religious imagery and you can experience spirituality at its best.



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Is Mysticism Created by a Religious Experience or by a Religious Building? I have pondered this question for years as a practicing Religious Architect. As my readings and experiences continue, it has become evident that today's modern architects have learned something from the past by integrating and touching the senses, but in a different way.

In today's design astatic, nature takes on a totally different meaning by focusing in on what God has created for us here on earth. The use and introduction of nature has yielded amazing examples of how to create mysticism in a most intimate way. The philosophical concept of connecting man to what God has blessed us with—nature—has yielded amazing examples in modern Religious Architecture.

It's the dichotomy between nature and built space that will be always in question. The sheer beauty of experiencing nature creates mysticism.

One can say that it is a most powerful way of connecting to God. Using nature and a space together in a design concept, modern architects have connected the dots to provide amazing spiritual spaces.



Current Trends in Religious Architecture

In the design of many religious spaces today, the connection with God through its traditional architecture and religious space is slowly vanishing. Today's modern religious facilities tend not to focus on the space or architecture, but rather on reaching the person through an "experience."

Where are we actually going in the trends of Religious Architecture? The people that have lived with traditional religious buildings continue to attend services, but not in the numbers as in years past. New Christian Bible-based facilities are more concerned with the message and not about the buildings. Increasing families and young people do not attend local services. Will technology be the answer? Many religious communities understand all these issues and are adapting to the times by offering a multitude of ways to reach their patrons. While the message can be sent electronically, is the true spiritual connection made? Ironically the answer is between you and God!